



History. Tradition. Community.



Dr. Brooke Cunningham is an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota. As an assistant professor, she conducts research on health equity with local health care systems and practices general internal medicine at the Community University Health Care Center. As a young student, Dr. Cunningham excelled at math and science. Because of her success, she was encouraged to pursue a career in medicine. However, Dr. Cunningham's personal desire was to be an agent for social change.

In college, Dr. Cunningham double majored in history and African American studies. After her third year of college, Dr. Cunningham attended a summer undergraduate biomedical research program at New York University School of Medicine. The program allowed her to study the mentoring of African-American physicians and showed her that she could pursue social science research, even as a physician. She realized that, by pursuing academic medicine, she could impact the ways that physicians think about racial disparities in health.

In 1996, Dr. Cunningham graduated from the University of Virginia. She then entered a joint MD/ PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania. There Dr. Cunningham studied sociology and took her qualifying exams in the sociology of race and in medical sociology. After medical school, she moved to North Carolina and completed her internal medicine residency at Duke University Medical Center. Unlike most of her peers at Duke, Dr. Cunningham decided not to pursue a career in specialty medicine. Instead, she left Duke with the intention to practice primary care. Many didn't

understand her choice. Yet, Dr. Cunningham remained true to herself and purpose. She believed the health care system should respond to the needs of the community, and primary care physicians were critical to addressing those needs.

After residency, Dr. Cunningham completed two postdoctoral fellowships at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, including a general internal medicine fellowship and the Greenwall Fellowship in Bioethics and Health Policy. In 2013, Dr. Cunningham was selected as an Academy Health Delivery System Science Fellow. She moved to Minnesota to complete the fellowship at the Medica Research Institute. The Delivery System Science Fellowship offered Dr. Cunningham an opportunity to study the needs and challenges facing health care delivery organizations as they seek to address health equity. She has been working with Allina Health for more than two years and is now also working with Hennepin County Medical Center.

This summer Dr. Cunningham will continue her research through conversations with health systems who are leading the nation in addressing health equity. Dr. Cunningham is committed to ensuring that her research leads to true change in community. She says, “I refuse to get knowledge and leave. I don’t want to just publish papers; I want to engage with people on the frontlines and in the C-suite. I want my research to be useful to people as they seek to transform care delivery to be more responsive to the needs of community.”

In 2014, Dr. Cunningham joined the research faculty in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, University of Minnesota. In 2015, the University of Minnesota awarded her two research grants—one to study organizational climates for health equity and a second to promote productive conversations on race in healthcare. As both a general internist and sociologist, she is interested in how physicians and policymakers make sense of race and frame the causes of and solutions to health disparities. She recently gave two lectures explaining the differences between race, ethnicity, and genetic ancestry, first to other researchers as part of the career development lecture series hosted by the University of Minnesota’s Clinical and Translational Science Institute and then as part of the curriculum for first-year medical students.

Dr. Cunningham is a devoted professor and provides mentorship, career guidance, and personal development assistance to her students. Her work and research demonstrate a

commitment to being part of the next generation of researchers that advances the field of health disparities.

Most Rewarding Work Experience

The best thing about being a physician/researcher/professor is the interactions with people. For example, when I'm in clinic, I try to get to know the people in front of me, to make sure my patients understand that I value their thoughts and feelings. I usually fall behind in writing my notes, but I believe my patients appreciate the connection. I can see it in their faces. I provide them with a space to share. I acknowledge what they're going through.

I really enjoy the work that I do. I try to be my best self everyday. Some days I fall short and when I do, I strive to do better the next day. I want to create working environments where physicians can be their best selves and provide the best care to all patients.

Advice for Aspiring Finance Professionals

Identify what gives you energy. Identify the things that you enjoy doing that also positively impact the wellbeing of others. Invest in areas where those things overlap and gain the credentials to be effective in those spaces. It is possible to be authentic and strategic at the same time.

Also, listen to your gut. When I went to medical school, despite my classmates telling me that I was "too smart" for primary care, I always knew that it was the right fit for me. That's why I love my job so much. Yet, I know from experience that it's not always easy to listen to that inner voice. Take time to figure out your path, what you are meant to do, and then have the courage to follow that path, even if it is the road less traveled.

Beacons of Leadership

I am inspired by people who work for racial justice. As an academic, I appreciate the efforts of black physician scholars, such as Dr. Camara Jones, President of the American Public Health Association, who have dedicated their careers to deepening our understanding of racism. I am also inspired by folks who do not have nor want a formal platform—for example, the grandmothers, mothers, fathers, teachers, who for generations, have done the hard work so that I might have a voice. I am also inspired by my mother, a leader in her own right, and the women-leaders that have been my second mothers, longtime friends, and colleagues

Hometown

- Richmond, VA.

Education

- University of Virginia, B.A. (1996)
- University of Pennsylvania, Masters of Sociology (2001)
- University of Pennsylvania, PhD Sociology (2006)
- University of Pennsylvania, MD Medicine (2007)
- Duke University Medical Center, Internal Medicine Residency (2007-2010)
- Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, General Internal Medicine (2010-2013)
- Johns Hopkins University, Greenwall Fellowship, Berman Institute of Bioethics (2010-2012)
- Johns Hopkins University, Fellow, Berman Institute of Bioethics (2012-2013)
- Medica Research Institute, AcademyHealth Deliver